

PD24 - Commentary and Translation of PD 24

Post by “Don” of September 2, 2020 at 11:56 PM

Principal Doctrine 24 (PD 24) is one of the more convoluted doctrines with multiple phrases and conjunctions. I would like to provide some commentary and break the doctrine down into manageable words and phrases for everyone to get a more coherent understanding of what Epicurus was communicating. You may also want to take a look at [this doctrine's page on the Epicurus Wiki](#):

First the original text:

Quote

Εἰ τιν' ἐκβαλεῖς ἀπλῶς αἰσθησιν καὶ μὴ διαιρήσεις τὸ δοξαζόμενον καὶ τὸ προσμένον καὶ τὸ παρὸν ἤδη κατὰ τὴν αἰσθησιν καὶ τὰ πάθη καὶ πᾶσαν φανταστικὴν ἐπιβολὴν τῆς διανοίας, συνταράξεις καὶ τὰς λοιπὰς αἰσθήσεις τῆ ματαίῳ δόξῃ, ὥστε τὸ κριτήριον ἅπαν ἐκβαλεῖς. εἰ δὲ βεβαιώσεις καὶ τὸ προσμένον ἅπαν ἐν ταῖς δοξαστικαῖς ἐννοίαις καὶ τὸ μὴ τὴν ἐπιμαρτύρησιν, οὐκ ἐκλείψει τὸ διεψευσμένον· ὥστ' ἀνηρηκῶς ἔση πᾶσαν ἀμφισβήτησιν καὶ πᾶσαν κρίσιν τοῦ ὀρθῶς ἢ μὴ ὀρθῶς.

Now, let's break it down before we put it all back together. I'll provide a (mostly) literal translation then provide commentary. “Phrases or words in quotes” will be followed by [their corresponding original text in brackets to allow you to follow along.]

Quote

Εἰ τιν' ἐκβαλεῖς ἀπλῶς αἰσθησιν...

Literal: “If” [Εἰ] you throw away “a single perception of the senses” [ἀπλῶς αἰσθησιν]...

Note that **ἐκβαλεῖς** is also the same word used later in the doctrine (...**ὥστε τὸ κριτήριον ἅπαν ἐκβαλεῖς.**) So, we should be sure to use the same word in our final translation in each location! The word **ἐκβαλεῖς** literally means “to cast, hurl, or throw away from yourself.” So, think about this as one literally “throwing away” or “discarding” the information you are getting from one of your sensations here. Note also that **αἰσθησιν** *aisthēsin* is the same word used when explaining the components of The Canon, the criteria of truth. More on this below.

Quote

...καὶ μὴ διαιρήσεις τὸ δοξαζόμενον κατὰ τὸ προσμένον καὶ τὸ παρὸν ἤδη...

Literal: ...and “you do not distinguish” [μὴ διαιρήσεις] between “the holding of an opinion or belief” [τὸ δοξαζόμενον] which is awaiting (confirmation) and what is present “now” [ἤδη]...

τὸ προσμένον gives the sense of waiting on something. It also can be used in the sense of “to wait for one in battle, i.e., to stand one’s ground against.”

Quote

...κατὰ τὴν αἴσθησιν καὶ τὰ πάθη καὶ πᾶσαν φανταστικὴν ἐπιβολὴν τῆς διανοίας,...

Literal: ...in accordance with perception of the senses, feeling, and true perceptions of the mind...

There’s a LOT to unpack here! First, I want to call your attention to that list of items:

- τὴν αἴσθησιν *tēn aisthēsin* “perception of the senses”
- καὶ τὰ πάθη *kai ta pathē* “and feeling (i.e., pleasure or pain)”
- καὶ πᾶσαν φανταστικὴν ἐπιβολὴν τῆς διανοίας *kai pasan phantastikē epibolēn tēs dianoiās* “and every true perception of the mind”

The description of the Canon, the criteria of truth, as outlined in Diogenes Laertius’s biography of Epicurus, contains the same list of items:

DL X.31: “Now in The Canon, Epicurus affirms that our “perceptions of the senses” [τὰς αἰσθήσεις] and preconceptions [προλήψεις] and our “feelings” [τὰ πάθη] are the standards of truth; the Epicureans generally make “perceptions of mental presentations” [τὰς φανταστικὰς ἐπιβολὰς τῆς διανοίας] to be also standards.”

So, what is being communicated in this phrase is literally Epicurus’s criteria of truth known as The Canon. I personally find it interesting that this list, either written by Epicurus as an epitome or sanctioned by the Garden as a study tool does not include the prolepses but instead includes the *phantastikē epibolē*. Could the two, in fact, be synonymous? Are the preconceptions identical to the perceptions of the mind? I personally find it better to translate *aisthesin* as “perception of the senses” to contrast it with the *phantastikē epibolē* “perceptions of the mind.” Both are perceptions with one being tangible (e.g., touch, taste, smell, etc.) and one is intangible (the mind). Norman DeWitt wrote a provocative paper entitled “Epicurus, Περὶ Φαντασίας” where he delved in detail into the *phantastikē epibolē tēs dianoiās*. He didn’t make the synonymous claim, that’s me. DeWitt translated the “*phantastikē epibolē tēs dianoiās*”

"(the incidence of a) true presentation of a single, existent object, though reduced to scale, as it registers itself upon the vision and mind of a sane, sober, and waking person." In any case, I find it intriguing in how the elements of The Canon are presented here in PD 24.

Quote

...συνταράξεις καὶ τὰς λοιπὰς αἰσθήσεις τῆ ματαίῳ δόξῃ,...

Literal: ...and "you will throw into confusion" [συνταράξεις] the remaining perceptions of the senses for a "groundless and empty belief" [ματαίῳ δόξῃ]...

This first word here, our verb - "syntaraxeis" [*you will throw into confusion*] - begins with **συν-**syn- which has the sense of "together, with..." and gives this verb the idea of throwing everything all together into confusion as well as to disturb or trouble. Consider this has a similar root to **ataraxia** "not disturbed or troubled."

The **λοιπὰς αἰσθήσεις** are the "remaining sensations, the rest of the senses" which are the others which you didn't throw away: Remember our first line. Compare **δόξῃ** doxe "belief" also occurs in the word encountered earlier: **δοξαζόμενον** doxazomenon "to hold an opinion or belief." A **ματαίῳ δόξῃ** is one that is groundless, vain, futile, empty, one with nothing to support it, more of an opinion than a true belief.

Quote

...ὥστε τὸ κριτήριον ἅπαν ἐκβαλεῖς.

Literal: ...thereby you throw away [ἐκβαλεῖς] the "entire" [ἅπαν] "the standard of truth" (κριτήριον "criterion").

And so we come to end of our first sentence! Here we encounter ἐκβαλεῖς from our first line. We'll use "throw away" here as well. The criterion here, literally the Greek word simply transliterated, is The Canon, the standard of truth, which refers back to our list of the components of The Canon earlier.

So, let's see what we have so far:

If you throw away a single perception of the senses AND you do not distinguish between a holding an opinion that awaits confirmation and what is present now in accordance with The Canon of truth (perception of the senses, feeling, and perception of the mind), you will throw all your other perceptions into confusion for a groundless opinion, thereby throwing away the entire Canon of truth.

If we break this up a little more, I think we can paraphrase it as:

Let's say you don't believe one of your senses, you cast it away from yourself. If you do this, you are throwing away the three legs of The Canon (namely, perceptions of the senses, of the mind, and the feelings of pleasure and pain) that must work together. If you don't use them all, you won't be able to tell the difference between an opinion that awaits confirmation (by the other senses) and what you can sense now in the present moment through The Canon. This is a groundless belief that is going to cause you trouble in correctly perceiving your remaining perceptions.

Well, that's not simpler, but it tries to bring together similar concepts.

Let's tackle the rest:

Quote

εἰ δὲ βεβαιώσεις καὶ τὸ προσμένον ἅπαν ἐν ταῖς δοξαστικαῖς ἐννοίαις...

Literal: Additionally, if you will "affirm as true" [βεβαιώσεις] everything that is waiting confirmation "in the matters of opinion about thinking" [ἐν ταῖς δοξαστικαῖς ἐννοίαις]...

Note that Epicurus talked about beliefs that were awaiting confirmation in the first part of this doctrine. So, here he's saying that "Let's say you affirm as true everything that should be awaiting confirmation by your other legs of The Canon." It sounds like you're putting the cart before the horse. How can you affirm something before you have confirmation?

Quote

...καὶ τὸ μὴ τὴν ἐπιμαρτύρησιν,...

Literal: ...and that which does not need a witness...

Here, the contrast is made with those opinions/beliefs that are awaiting confirmation and those which do not need any witness. So, you're affirming as true BOTH everything that is awaiting confirmation and that which doesn't (i.e., that which is present to you now in accordance with The Canon).

Quote

...οὐκ ἐκλείψει τὸ διεψευσμένον·

Literal: "You will not abandon" [οὐκ ἐκλείψει] "that which is altogether false" [τὸ διεψευσμένον];...

If you do all those things we just mentioned, you will not abandon “that which is altogether false.” It’s interesting that the verb here - ἐκλείπει ekleipsei - is the same word as English “eclipse” and had similar connotations in the Greek. Consider if you did abandon falsehood, you would blot out the light of falsehood for the light of truth. But, you’re still in darkness if you don’t come to your senses.

Quote

ὥστ’ τετηρηκῶς ἔση πᾶσαν ἀμφισβήτησιν καὶ πᾶσαν κρίσιν τοῦ ὀρθῶς ἢ μὴ ὀρθῶς.

Literal: ...therefore, you will “retain” [τετηρηκῶς] all “doubt” [ἀμφισβήτησιν] and all judgement [κρίσιν] of what is correct and what is not correct.

I’ve seen one online Greek text that has ἀνηρηκῶς *anerekos* “abolish” instead of τετηρηκῶς *teterekos* “preserve, retain”. This is a CRUCIAL difference, and τετηρηκῶς is in the Oxford Arundel MS 531 manuscript so I’m accepting that as correct. And *teterekos* makes more sense when taken in context of the rest of PD 24. We preserve all doubt and judgement, we are not going to make any judgement either way and we’re going to preserve our doubt.

I also think it’s interesting and important to note that the same word is used in two places at the end: ὀρθῶς *orthos*. This is the “orthos” in orthodox, orthogonal, orthodontist, etc. I feel it is significant because it also has the sense of “straight” and The Canon we’ve been referring to is a literal straight-edge, ruler, measuring rod. So, it would be nice to play this up in a translation, but it’s not that easy in English. You could say something like “what is and is not on the straight and narrow” but that’s pushing it.

So, the last section can be paraphrased:

If you affirm everything as true - both those opinions that await confirmation and those here and now evident to your senses - you will not abandon falsehood and retain all doubt and refrain from any judgement as to what is correct and what is not correct.

So, that “groundless belief” appears to be the unwillingness to take a stand and just accept that everything is true. You can’t make a decision! Epicurus seems to be calling us to trust in The Canon as our criteria of truth, to distinguish between what we don’t know right now - what’s awaiting confirmation - and what is evident to our senses right now in the present moment.

I hope this provides food for thought even if it doesn’t clear up the concepts put forward here in PD 24.

Post by “Godfrey” of September 3, 2020 at 1:24 AM

Thanks [Don](#) ! Lots to think about. I'm particularly intrigued by the "true perceptions of the mind." Hmmmm....

Post by "Cassius" of September 3, 2020 at 2:12 AM

Great work Don! Thanks for preparing that!

Post by "Cassius" of September 3, 2020 at 9:23 AM

What are our takeaways from this?

I would say first and most easily obvious he is saying that we should pay attention to all our faculties and the information that they provide to us (presumably because they are reported honestly and in this sense are "true"). That's probably pretty noncontroversial, except maybe if someone pursues the non-Epicurean reasoning that the senses are never to be trusted and should simply be ignored in favor of pure dialectical reasoning.

The deeper parts include:

- (1) That the data from the "mental presentations' / anticipations" and also the feelings of pleasure and pain are entitled to equal consideration with the data from the five senses.
- (2) That we should "wait" and hold open as at least potentially "true" all theories which have support from some date from some combination of the three faculties, and
- (3) That we should be careful not to select from among the unrefuted possibilities any favorite or pet theory to hold as the only "true" possibility so long as other possibilities remain viable.

All of this is also presumably the foundation of affirming that "truth" comes to us through these three faculties and not from any other way which is NOT based on these three faculties (i.e. divine revelation, totally abstract logic / rationalism)

I would say one of the most continuously difficult parts is that of separating (1) instances of data provided by the "mental presentations/anticipations" from (2) conceptual reasoning, in which concepts are formed after a lot of thought and deliberation and reasoning. I continue to think that if we were to equate "mental presentations/anticipations" with "concepts" we would

be confusing two distinct things (the process vs the result) into a single thing (the concept which the result of thinking) and we'd have a feedback loop which would introduce rationalism into the canon and would be why that Epicurus himself only had THREE legs, but the "other Epicureans (in my view mistakenly) came up with four.

Post by "Don" of September 3, 2020 at 11:02 AM

Quote from Cassius

I would say one of the most continuously difficult parts is that of separating (1) instances of data provided by the "mental presentations/anticipations" from (2) conceptual reasoning, in which concepts are formed after a lot of thought and deliberation and reasoning. I continue to think that if we were to equate "mental presentations/anticipations" with "concepts" we would be confusing two distinct things (the process vs the result) into a single thing (the concept which the result of thinking) and we'd have a feedback loop which would introduce rationalism into the canon and would be why that Epicurus himself only had THREE legs, but the "other Epicureans (in my view mistakenly) came up with four.

This is why I was so surprised when I realized I saw the three components of the Canon listed and the epibolē were included but not the prolepses. I am convinced the doctrine is talking about the Canon. DL seems to imply that the *Epicureans" added a fourth leg to the Canon but PD 24 seems to imply that aisthēsin, pathē, and epibolē were legitimately a three legged Canon too.

Are the epibolē and prolepses two facets of the same faculty? I believe we've discussed elsewhere on the forum the innate nature of the prolepses. The phrase phantastikē epibolē occurs in DL X.50 and 51

Quote

Falsehood and error always depend upon the intrusion of opinion (when a fact awaits) confirmation or the absence of contradiction, which fact is afterwards frequently not confirmed (or even contradicted) [following a certain movement in ourselves connected with, but distinct from, the **mental picture** presented--which is the cause of error.] [51] "For the presentations which, e.g., are received in a picture or arise in dreams, or from any other form of apprehension by the mind or by the other criteria of truth, would never have resembled what we call the real and true things, had it not been for certain actual things of the kind with which we come in contact. Error would not have occurred, if we had not experienced some other movement in ourselves, conjoined

with, but distinct from, the **perception of what is presented**. And from this movement, if it be not confirmed or be contradicted, falsehood results ; while, if it be confirmed or not contradicted, truth results.

"Mental picture" is the translation here in 50, and "perception of what is presented" in 51 of *phantastikē epibolē*. That's the trouble with translations! They can hide the same phrases in the original. And 50 and 51 are from the Letter to Herodotus, so this is Epicurus talking. Plus the fact that he's talking about opinion, falsehood, "when a fact awaits", etc., he's addressing the same concerns that arise in PD 24.

Post by "Cassius" of September 3, 2020 at 11:27 AM

[Quote from Don](#)

Are the *epibolē* and *prolepses* two facets of the same faculty? I believe we've discussed elsewhere on the forum the innate nature of the *prolepses*. The phrase *phantastikē epibolē* occurs in DL X.50 and 51

I would say almost certainly yes, they are two facets or descriptions of the same faculty. I agree with your comment that this listing of three almost certainly is intended to be a listing of the three legs of the canon. That is why I think there's so much work to do in understanding exactly what "an anticipation" really is. I think an anticipation/*prolepsis*/mental presentation/mental picture canNOT be a "concept" as we understand the term in logical reasoning, for example as with the concept of "capitalism" or the concept of "socialism" or whatever. Something that is "defined" in terms of "words" necessarily entails opinions about what to include, and therefore cannot be "canonical" or constitute a "mental picture" which is canonical.

But on the other hand a certain number of mental images probably constitutes at least part of the input that is eventually used to form a "concept." So what I am thinking is that these are parallel: the faculty of anticipations must be something like "sight." Sight is a faculty whereby the eyes assemble and process light. The anticipations would be parallel in that the "faculty of anticipations" assembles and processes mental pictures without thinking about them. But no single mental picture is a "concept" any more than a single photon or processing of light is a "sight." Cameras produce images but don't "think" about them. Our brains/minds presumably assemble all these things (input from eyes, ears, feelings, anticipations, etc) through pre-rational processes, and that "pre-rationality" is the essence of what I would think Epicurus would insist is required for a faculty to be described as canonical. If opinion is involved in producing something, then the result cannot be "trusted" or given the same level of authority as any of the three canonical faculties. If we do elevate a concept formed by reasoning to

canonical status, then we have a feedback loop, and we have erased the distinction between the canonical faculties and opinions.

Error comes in opinion and the assembling and uses of opinions (the rational process). Whatever anticipations are, I firmly think that Epicurus saw them as "pre-rational," and that would fit a faculty that "automatically" assembles individual mental pictures just like the eyes and the ears assemble light and sounds without "thinking" about them.

Post by “Don” of September 3, 2020 at 11:38 AM

Oh! I ****really**** like where you're going with that, [Cassius](#). I especially liked this section:

Quote from Cassius

But no single mental picture is a "concept" any more than a single photon or processing of light is a "sight." Cameras produce images but don't "think" about them. Our brains/minds presumably assemble all these things through pre-rational processes, and that "pre-rationality" is the essence of what I would think Epicurus would insist is required for a faculty to be described as canonical. Error comes in opinion and the assembling and uses of opinions (the rational process). Whatever anticipations are, I firmly think that Epicurus saw them as "pre-rational," and that would fit a faculty that "automatically" assembles individual mental pictures just like the eyes and the ears assemble light and sounds without "thinking" about them.

(Pours a glass of wine, seats himself in a comfy chair) Please, go on! 😊

Post by “Cassius” of September 3, 2020 at 12:05 PM

Well I am not sure I can go much further! 😊 I think we're seeing that Epicurus's response to issues of "skepticism" and "knowledge"" was to focus on what those words meant and define as clearly as possible what it means to be "true" and "real" -- with the result that the rigorous conclusion is that "truth" for is what is or could be revealed to us through the canonical faculties. Asking for more than that --- asking for "certainty" -- implies a standard of proof that is impossible for a human being and is not even relevant to a human being in any way.

Within that kind of framework, what is "true" is what can be ascertained through the canonical faculties, and nothing else is or can be "true" or "real" to us.

As DeWitt says, Epicurus needed a standard of truth in the realm of relationships or abstractions - we need to go back and get his exact words - but I think that the problem arises when we say that the anticipations are standards of truth in the realm of "ideas." IDEAS are fully-formed concepts, and fully-formed concepts necessarily involved opinion and serve themselves as canonical "truth." Fully-formed ideas / concepts are highly useful and much to be appreciated, but they can never in themselves be considered "universal truths" that rise to the level of them always being true and real to individual humans.

Don in my mind this is where I always fall back to a passage from the 1770's book that I quote from by Jackson Barwis, his book against John Locke's argument against "innate ideas." Barwise defended not innate "ideas" but innate "principles of thinking." The book was entitled "Dialogue on Innate Principles." In that book (primarily chapter one of that book) Barwis argues that there is a huge distinction between innate IDEAS vs innate PRINCIPLES. Barwis argues that Locke and others are wrong to assert that there are innate *ideas*, but that there certainly are innate *principles of functioning* that go into ideas.

Here is the important section. Underlining is my emphasis Barwis is talking about innate "moral" principles here, but I think the point applies more widely to the issue of how "principles" are different from "ideas." I think the faculty of anticipations is dealing with the "principles" as discussed below, not with "ideas." We are not born with innate ideas, but we are born with a faculty that processes information in certain ways (according to certain principles):

When I take a general view of the arguments adduced by Mr. Locke against innate moral principles; and when I see what he produces, as the most indisputable innate principles, "if any be so," I am inclined to think there must have been some very great mistake as to the true nature of the things in question: for he lays down certain propositions, (no matter whether moral or scientific, so they be but true) and then proves that such propositions, considered merely as propositions, formed by our rational faculty, after due consideration of things, as all true propositions must be, are not innate. Nothing more obvious! But surely those whom he opposes, must, or ought to have meant, (though I cannot say I have read their arguments, nor do I mean to answer for anyone but myself) not that the propositions themselves were innate, but, that the conscious internal sentiments, on which such moral propositions are founded, were innate.

He looked on me, interrogatively. I said it might be so, and that I saw a great difference in those things.

Or perhaps, continued he, the mistake may have arisen from following too closely the mode, in which it is necessary to proceed, in order to acquire a knowledge of certain sciences, as in geometry: that is, by laying down some clear and self-evident axioms, or rational propositions. But even here it should be remembered that, in the natures of things, there were principles which had existence anterior to the formation of these axioms or propositions, and on which they are founded, and on which they depend for their existence: as, extension and solidity.

-- I gave an assenting inclination of the head.

I cannot, therefore, conceive, added he, that what we ought to understand by innate moral principles, can by any means, when fairly explained, be imagined to bear any similitude to such propositions as Mr. Locke advances as bidding fairest to be innate, nor to any other propositions. That is, I cannot conceive that our innate moral principles, our natural sentiments, or internal conscious feelings, (name them how you please) which we derive, and which result, from our very nature as creatures morally relative, are at all like unto any propositions whatever.

Who can discover any similitude to any conscious sentiment of the soul in these strangely irrelative propositions: "Whatever is, is."

"It is impossible for the same thing to be, and not to be?"

- Nobody. -

The innate principles of the soul, continued he, cannot, any more than those of the body, be propositions. They must be in us antecedently to all our reasonings about them, or they could never be in us at all: for we cannot, by reasoning, create any thing, the principles of which did not exist antecedently. We can, indeed, describe our innate sentiments and perceptions to each other; we can reason, and we can make propositions about them; but our reasonings neither are, nor can create in us, moral principles. They exist prior to, and independently of, all reasoning, and all propositions about them.

When we are told that benevolence is pleasing; that malevolence is painful; we are not convinced of these truths by reasoning, nor by forming them into propositions: but by an appeal to the innate internal affections of our souls: and if on such an appeal, we could not feel within the sentiment of benevolence, and the peculiar pleasure attending it; and that of malevolence and its concomitant pain; not all the reasoning in the world could ever make us sensible of them, or enable us to understand their nature.

...

Even in the abstracted sciences of arithmetic and geometry, reason can create no principles in the natures of the things treated of. It can lay down axioms, and draw up propositions concerning numbers, extension, and solidity; but numbers, extension, and solidity, existed prior to any reasoning about them.

And here I must observe that the assent or dissent that we give to propositions in these sciences, which are but little interesting to our nature, is drawn from a source widely different from that which we give to moral propositions. Thus, when we are told that the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles, and see the demonstration; we say simply, true. That they are equal to three right angles; false. These things being irrelative to morals, they move no conscious sentiment, and do therefore only receive our bare assent or dissent as a mere object of sense; in the same manner as when we say a thing is, or is not, black or white, or round or square; we use our eyes, and are satisfied. But the truth or falsehood of moral propositions must be judged of by another measure; through a more interesting medium: we must apply to our internal sense; our divine monitor and guide within; through which the just and unjust, the right and wrong, the moral beauty and deformity of human minds, and of human actions, can only be perceived. And this internal sense must most undoubtedly be innate, as we have already shown; it could not otherwise have existence in us; we not being able, by reasoning, or by any other means, to give ourselves any new sense, or to create, in our nature, any principle at all. I therefore think Mr. Locke, in speaking of innate moral principles, ought, at least, to have made a difference between propositions relative to morals, and those which have no such relation.

If you get interested in the entire argument, [it is here](#):

So the argument that I would make is that there must be some kind of innate mechanism that assembles mental pictures, and that did this mechanism not exist, we would never experience mental pictures in the first place. This mental picture mechanism functions "innately" - pre-rationally, and it can function in ways that we conclude are not "true to all the facts."

An example of that would be in Epicurus's letter to Menoeceus: "But they are not such as the many believe them to be: for indeed they do not consistently represent them as they believe them to be. And the impious man is not he who popularly denies the gods of the many, but he who attaches to the gods the beliefs of the many. For the statements of the many about the gods are not [pre]conceptions derived from sensation, but false suppositions, according to which the greatest misfortunes befall the wicked and the greatest blessings (the good) by the gift of the gods." (This is the Bailey version, and he insists on using "concepts." I inserted the [pre] because everyone else uses anticipations or prolepsis here rather than "concepts." This is why I am so unhappy with Bailey much of the time.)

Post by "Don" of September 3, 2020 at 1:04 PM

For not being sure if you could go much further, I think you've done very well! 😊

I do think you're onto something, and the Barwis excerpt appears to me too to be directly relevant to the discussion. Thanks for that!

I plan to delve back into the texts at some point armed with your information here.

Post by “Don” of September 3, 2020 at 1:27 PM

I went back to the Letter to Herodotus directly prior to that excerpt from DL X.50 above:

Quote

And whatever presentation we derive by direct contact, whether it be **with the mind** or **with the sense-organs**, be it shape that is presented or other properties, this shape as presented is the shape of the solid thing, and it is due either to a close coherence of the image as a whole or to a mere remnant of its parts.

Here the term *phantastikē epibolē* is not used, and I'm working through the Greek. But the it does say we perceive with the mind and the sense organs.

Post by “Cassius” of September 3, 2020 at 2:46 PM

And i gather that this is why Dewitt referred to the mind as a "supersensory organ"

In dreamful sleep, according to Epicurus, the erring, automatic mind alone is active. Bodily sensation, memory and volition are all quiescent. Under these circumstances the stage is cleared for the entrance of all the random, floating idols that survive from the swift, coherent streams that under waking conditions press upon the organs of sense and register themselves as sensations. Of these errant, **subsensory** idols the passive mind, partly because of its relief from interference and control, and partly because of the supermobility and supersensitivity of its component atoms, alone is capable of taking cognizance. Thus it functions as a supersense.

To complete this exposition a subsidiary doctrine of the two reactions must be invoked. Let it be assumed that the image of a centaur presents itself to the dreamer; it may even be a galloping centaur. This acts as a stimulus to the mind and causes a reaction, *hinesis*. This is not the end, however, because a second reaction follows and the automatic mind registers a recognition: "It is a centaur." The dream carries the

208

So far as vision is concerned, Epicurus denied that the gods were visible to the physical eye, though he did think them visible to the mind when operating as a [supersensory](#) organ of vision. The value attached to this evidence, however, was strictly limited. It served two purposes: first, to furnish a hint concerning the form of the gods, and second, to awaken in the minds of men the innate notion of the divine being there residing. This innate notion, Prolepsis or Anticipation, was the prime and primal evidence of the existence of gods. According to this notion the gods enjoyed perfect happiness and were immune to corruption. Add to this the information that they were anthropomorphic, gleaned from visions whether of day or night, and this is the sum total of knowledge attainable without recourse to reason and deduction.

Post by “Don” of September 3, 2020 at 3:59 PM

I'm always suspicious of *super-* words. Dangerously close to supernatural. However, "supersensory" seems to imply a sense "above" the other senses in DeWitt's case. And by "subsensory" idols, he seems to mean "images not able to be perceived by the traditional 5 physical senses."

I wish he'd have spelled it "eidols" or used "images." Idols is such a loaded word.

Here's an [interesting article that talks about our other "senses" in addition to taste, smell, etc.](#) I wonder what Epicurus would make of [synaesthesia](#)?

Post by “Godfrey” of September 4, 2020 at 3:58 PM

Excellent thread! In a less scholarly vein regarding perceptions of the mind...

So I was just eating tortilla chips with my lunch. I picked up a chip and looked at it. I noticed a *spontaneous memory* of eating chips in the past, and also noticed a *spontaneous anticipation* of the pleasure I was about to experience. Eating the chip confirmed the truth of that pleasure.

In other words my sensations (vision, touch, smell) stimulated mental perceptions, in this case a *spontaneous* memory and anticipation of pleasure which served as a guide to action.

In reference to the fact that we may have multiple senses (up to 20?) senses and two feelings, it seems probable that we have several types of prolepses, of which this description is just one.

Just some food for thought. 😊 (ouch)

Post by “Don” of September 4, 2020 at 4:49 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

Just some food for thought. 😊 (ouch)

LOL! Well played, [Godfrey](#) !

But seriously, I think you're onto something there. It helps to bring things down to everyday experiences. Epicurus was all about writing clearly and making things understandable and not hiding behind fancy, convoluted arguments. You're following in the footsteps of Epicurus here! Pass the chips! 😊

Post by “Bryan” of December 9, 2023 at 12:43 PM

I agree that *epibole tes dianoias* (mental focus) and *prolepseis* (anticipations/stereotypes) are two facets of the same faculty. I also agree every sensation (the criteria of reality) is prerational.

All ideas that are based in reality must necessarily be based upon images.

If the idea is not based in reality -- not based on images -- then it is not a prolepsis but a hypolepsis (post conception, afterthought, supposition) [DL 10.124].

Πάσα φανταστική ἐπιβολή is something like “the entire graphic perception” “the full pictorial focus” “the complete visual attention.”

I think the use of φανταστική (‘graphic’) here is only further explaining the process of mental focus; the whole phrase is therefore equivalent to ἡ ἐπιβολή τῆς διανοίας (‘the focus of the mind’), which Lucretius translates as *animī iniectus* ‘a casting of mental energy’ or ‘a throwing out of the attention’ [DRN 2.740].

Instead of using the modern analogy of ‘focusing’ the mind (as though the mind were something like a camera), Ἐπίκουρος and Lucretius use the analogy of ‘throwing’ or ‘casting’ the mind (as though the mind were something like a net). The paraphrases *animī iniectus* and ἡ ἐπιβολή τῆς διανοίας therefore are equivalent to our modern use of ‘attention.’

Basically, we need to distinguish between sensations and ideas. Sensations are true per se, but ideas are only true if they accurately reflect our repeated sensations. If we accept any idea as true per se, without demanding any evidence, we have undermined our sensations which are the only foundation we have to accurately understand our environment.

Post by “BrainToBeing” of December 9, 2023 at 4:02 PM

Whoa, you guys are smart! This is erudite stuff!

So, for your entertainment, I'll throw another concept into the works: neurobiology and data segregation on entry.

The human brain is not evolved to discover abstract truth. It is evolved to determine reaction patterns, based upon what we have construed as "truth". If you look at the actual anatomy of information processing you will discover that as information comes in through the senses it literally passes by - for first appreciation - the limbic (emotive) system. This anatomical foundation is based on evolutionary survival issues. If a lion is coming at you and someone is offering you an ice cream cone, you better "ignore" the ice cream cone and pay attention to the lion, or it will be your last ice cream cone.

In brain processing, incoming information is sorted by this limbic assessment into "relevant", "not-relevant" and "curious". That which is deemed relevant - by the emotive systems - is retained for action determination. That which is deemed not-relevant-for-current-use is relatively side-stepped. That which is determined "curious" is sent on to the cortex for further analysis. Very interesting and potentially complex processing proceeds from there.

The relevance of this to the above discussion is that "truth" - within our appreciation of it - is assessed from sorted data, not absolute data. There is very interesting hard science related to this. And, this leads us to Hobbes: "Such truth as opposeth no man's profit nor pleasure is to all men welcome." He understood.

For an example of this processing problem you can see the following:
<https://www.npr.org/2010/05/19/126...visible-gorilla>

There are many, many other objective-science examples of processing issues related to this "perception" problem.

So, you can add this to the erudite discussion above to see where it leads you.

Cheers,

Post by “Pacatus” of December 9, 2023 at 7:01 PM

[Quote from BrainToBeing](#)

If you look at the actual anatomy of information processing you will discover that as information comes in through the senses it literally passes by - for first appreciation - the limbic (emotive) system.

Just a lay-schlock’s question from recall: does this relate to Antonio Damasio’s research, finding that emotion (“the feeling of what happens”) – far from being something that ought to be removed from cognitive analysis and decision-making (ala, say, the Stoics) – is essential to proper cognitive functioning?

[I’m not sure I’ve even put that well; don’t let it derail the rest of the discussion here.]

Post by “BrainToBeing” of December 9, 2023 at 11:02 PM

Yes, basically. And you did put it well.

The analysis of the subject does depend on the evaluation of "proper cognitive functioning". We can say that the emotive system is built-in and central to how we process the world. Removing it from consideration (vis a vis Spock, at least the Vulcan part of him) doesn't work for our species. It actually leads to worse existential anguish. So, "proper cognitive functioning" needs to consider what emotions tell us. However, the degree to which that is a focus depends upon the situation. Over-utilization of emotions leads to a type of chaos, over-reactivity, and distraction from analysis. Under-utilization leads to failure to understand those often-hidden but important "subconscious" beliefs, values, and expectations that frame our perspectives of the world. Emotions tell us about these. Paying attention to emotions helps us to understand what is really driving our reaction patterns (why we get upset about something "little", or why a person "rubs us the wrong way", for examples). Overall this is a long discussion.

There are varying viewpoints on this subject. The main perspective is that we do, objectively, have the emotive system and if we want to function well overall we need to understand its role and what it tells us.

Cheers.

Post by “Don” of December 9, 2023 at 11:41 PM

I like the quote:

"Most of us think of ourselves as thinking creatures that feel, but we are actually feeling creatures that think."

Jill Bolte Taylor, *My Stroke of Insight: A Brain Scientist's Personal Journey*

Post by “Kalosyni” of March 9, 2026 at 9:39 AM

Here are my thoughts on this, by just using the wording of Bailey translation, first posting the PD, then directly following is my take.

PD.24: "If you reject any single sensation, and fail to distinguish between the conclusion of opinion, as to the appearance awaiting confirmation, and that which is actually given by the sensation or feeling, or each intuitive apprehension of the mind, you will confound all other sensations, as well, with the same groundless opinion, so that you will reject every standard of judgment. And if among the mental images created by your opinion you affirm both that which awaits confirmation, and that which does not, you will not escape error, since you will have preserved the whole cause of doubt in every judgment between what is right and what is wrong."

This points out how it is necessary, when you are first beginning an evaluation of truth, to be sure you have included all of your observations (as per the senses), and then also it is necessary to distinguish between various types of evidence and assign levels of trustworthiness onto each type (see [PD22](#)) - and it must be done correctly at the basic starting level or else your later observations will be made in error. And so we see that there are: 1) observations as per the senses, 2) conclusions that already exist through earlier opinions on the matter, 3) new inferences generated by the newest observations. All of these must be distinguished (one from another) and no conclusions should be stated as true until there are adequate observations which clearly confirm the conclusion.

PD.22: "We must consider both the real purpose, and all the evidence of direct perception, to which we always refer the conclusions of opinion; otherwise, all will be full of doubt and confusion."

Post by “Cassius” of March 9, 2026 at 10:35 AM

That's right, and it's not easy but what's the alternative? You can throw up your hands and not even try to get it right. That's what is advocated by Socrates and the radical skeptics who say it's never possible to be confident of anything. And what do you do then? - You give up studying nature and you retreat to wishful thinking about "virtue" - and let others make decisions for you.

That's a high price to pay to just to win a pat on the back from modern philosophers.

Post by “DaveT” of March 10, 2026 at 10:39 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

That's a high price to pay to just to win a pat on the back from modern philosophers.

Agreeing with your post, but I don't catch your meaning of this part.

Post by “Cassius” of March 10, 2026 at 12:13 PM

Quote

[Quote from Cassius](#)

That's a high price to pay to just to win a pat on the back from modern philosophers.

Agreeing with your post, but I don't catch your meaning of this part.

My explanation for this applies to much of the reason that Dave and I appear to disagree - but I don't think we are really that far apart.

I would like to be proven wrong, but my own perception is that the problems posed by skepticism and how to unwind them are much deeper than what many seem to think.

Dave and I have a legal background and we are familiar with the position that "the law" requires finality. You can't go on debating who is right and who is wrong forever on legal matters, so you have to come up with a standard of proof and a mechanism for applying it. In the English-speaking countries that has generally been done by a jury system in which we have rules of evidence as to what types of evidence can even be submitted to a jury, which is held to have the ultimate authority to find the facts of a case. It is a major issue in legal theory as to whether juries should be allowed to be ultimate factfinders, or whether that should be delegated to "experts" in particular fields.

The English common law system has traditionally held that randomly selected "jurors of our peers" are best positioned to deliver justice, even though they are not "experts" in their fields. In fact, judges instruct jurors that even where "experts" are allowed to testify as to their opinions about a case, the jurors do not have to accept their opinions. The jurors are specifically allowed by our system of justice to accept or reject some or all or none of what an expert says.

And a large part of the reason for that rule is that it is almost always possible - depending on how much money you have to spend - to find an expert who will say almost anything. Trials turn into 'battles of experts' with highly-credentialed experts on totally opposite sides of almost every question. Our system of justice has traditionally held that we are not going to delegate final decisions to anyone but the "jury of our peers" because that is where we find the most common sense and the least prejudice.

This is as stated in Jefferson's letter to Peter Carr in referencing ploughmen vs professors:

Quote

Moral Philosophy. I think it lost time to attend lectures on this branch. He who made us would have been a pitiful bungler, if he had made the rules of our moral conduct a matter of science. For one man of science, there are thousands who are not. What would have become of them? Man was destined for society. His morality, therefore, was to be formed to this object. He was endowed with a sense of right and wrong, merely relative to this. This sense is as much a part of his Nature, as the sense of hearing, seeing, feeling; it is the true foundation of morality, and not the [beautiful], truth, &c., as fanciful writers have imagined. The moral sense, or conscience, is as much a part of man as his leg or arm. It is given to all human beings in a stronger or weaker degree, as force of members is given them in a greater or less degree. It may be strengthened by exercise, as may any particular limb of the body. This sense is submitted, indeed, in some degree, to the guidance of reason; but it is a small stock which is required for this: even a less one than what we call common sense. State a moral case to a ploughman and a professor. The former will decide it as well, & often better than the latter, because he has not been led astray by artificial rules. In this branch, therefore,

read good books, because they will encourage, as well as direct your feelings. The writings of Sterne, particularly, form the best course of morality that ever was written. Besides these, read the books mentioned in the enclosed paper; and, above all things, lose no occasion of exercising your dispositions to be grateful, to be generous, to be charitable, to be humane, to be true, just, firm, orderly, courageous, &c. Consider every act of this kind, as an exercise which will strengthen your moral faculties & increase your worth.

Post by “DaveT” of March 10, 2026 at 9:21 PM

[Cassius](#) I'm lost! Please see the quotes I attached below and bolded relevant parts. Looking at the beginning of [Kalosyni](#)'s post, below, then your reply, and your answer to my question to you for clarification has me lost. Especially the Jefferson quote.

Two points. As you noted I don't think we are far apart, if at all on almost everything. But I've lost the thread of what we are far apart on.

In your response to me, you quoted Thos. Jefferson; is he the modern philosopher you referred to and I asked about? I must not understand your train of thought. I was thinking perhaps you were referring to 20th century philosophers as being somehow out in left field.

Your referral to **radical skeptics**, has me confused again. Am I wrong to conclude that in your use of those two words, radical skeptics mean the philosophers of ancient Greece BCE? With respect, you seem to have a bone to pick with the skeptics of old and their influence on some. I believe I understand the battle of ideas between the school of Epicurus and the Skeptics with a capital S.

However, I'm not clear if you are referring to ancient Skepticism that has at best only a remote similarity to the modern scientific methods of finding truth only after experimental testing of any **concepts of any nature until there is a consensus to rule-out or rule-in unproven opinion.**

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

This points out how it is necessary, when you are first beginning an evaluation of truth, to be sure you have included all of your observations (as per the senses), and then also it is necessary to distinguish between various types of evidence and assign levels of trustworthiness onto each type (see [PD22](#)) - and it must be done correctly at the basic

starting level or else your later observations will be made in error. And so we see that there are: 1) observations as per the senses, 2) conclusions that already exist through earlier opinions on the matter, 3) new inferences generated by the newest observations. All of these must be distinguished (one from another) and no conclusions should be stated as true until there are adequate observations which clearly confirm the conclusion.

PD.22: "We must consider both the real purpose, and all the evidence of direct perception, to which we always refer the conclusions of opinion; otherwise, all will be full of doubt and confusion." Bold added

[Quote from Cassius](#)

That's right, and it's not easy but what's the alternative? **You can throw up your hands and not even try to get it right. That's what is advocated by Socrates and the radical skeptics who say it's never possible to be confident of anything.** And what do you do then? - You give up studying nature and you retreat to wishful thinking about "virtue" - and let others make decisions for you.

That's a high price to pay to just to win a pat on the back from modern philosophers.

[Quote from DaveT](#)

Agreeing with your post, but I don't catch your meaning of this part.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

I would like to be proven wrong, but my own perception is that the problems posed by skepticism and how to unwind them are much deeper than what many seem to think.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

That's right, and it's not easy but what's the alternative? You can throw up your hands and not even try to get it right. That's what is advocated by Socrates and the radical skeptics who say it's never possible to be confident of anything. And what do you do then? - You give up studying nature and you retreat to wishful thinking about "virtue" - and let others make decisions for you.

That's a high price to pay to just to win a pat on the back from modern philosophers.

Post by “Kalosyni” of March 11, 2026 at 7:16 AM

Here are some areas to compare and contrast, and perhaps if we place them in a table of comparison it would become more clear:

-----Ancient Skepticism vs modern notion of skepticism, vs aspects of "skepticism" in modern science vs Epicurean canonicity, AND for each one what level of "feeling" of "knowing truth".

Is it possible that there were differing takes on the sense of knowing (and level of belief vs faith) within various groups of Epicureans (just like there were likely differing takes on mental vs physical pleasures)...it wouldn't be right to assume that all ancient Epicureans were "cookie cutter" exactly the same (thinking/believing exactly the same), because human beings are complex, and you can see now (in our modern studies) how we have the "minimalist" Epicureans and the "maximalist" Epicureans - so perhaps there was also some differences between levels of dogmatism (plus also levels of belief in the gods).

Post by “Cassius” of March 11, 2026 at 7:44 AM

[Quote from DaveT](#)

In your response to me, you quoted Thos. Jefferson; is he the modern philosopher you referred to and I asked about? I must not understand your train of thought. I was thinking perhaps you were referring to 20th century philosophers as being somehow out in left field.

I am definitely considering Jefferson, who embraced Epicurus in my view very accurately, as correct in most all of his statements on these issues. I have the most relevant of his statements relating to Epicurus here: <https://newepicurean.com/jefferson/>

And in general it's fair to say that I am speaking against the more modern philosophers, who seem in most cases to be in agreement with Socrates that nothing is really "knowable."

[Quote from DaveT](#)

Your referral to radical skeptics, has me confused again. Am I wrong to conclude that in your use of those two words, radical skeptics mean the philosophers of ancient Greece BCE? With respect, you seem to have a bone to pick with the skeptics of old and their

influence on some. I believe I understand the battle of ideas between the school of Epicurus and the Skeptics with a capital S.

"radical skeptics" is a term i use to describe anyone who claims that no knowledge of any kind is possible. This would include Socrates, although Socrates apparently was content with the contradiction that he was confident that he know nothing. This does NOT include all Greek philosophers BCE, as some taught specific doctrines. Yes it's bad to be wrong, as many of them were in arguing things like it is impossible to walk across a room, but worse than being wrong is to take the position that it is impossible ever to be right about anything. As long as you have a standard to declare something to be "right," then you eventually have hope of being right. If you say that it's impossible to be "right" about anything, then you are in the position of the skeptics who Diogenes of Oinoanda criticized when saying that no one will ever seek the truth if they consider it impossible to find.

In general I agree that it is useful to distinguish the worst of the Skeptics with a capital "S", but unfortunately it's not sufficient to do that in many cases because the depth of this problem is not recognized in general conversation. Many people tend to think that ALL skepticism is "good" just like they think ALL dogmatism is "bad," because they are aren't familiar with the depth of the issue.

We tend to attract here - as is our goal - people with an interest in philosophy but not deep training in it, and this becomes one of the most important initial questions to cover, which is why it's a constant topic of conversation,

[Quote from DaveT](#)

However, I'm not clear if you are referring to ancient Skepticism that has at best only a remote similarity to the modern scientific methods of finding truth only after experimental testing of any concepts of any nature until there is a consensus to rule-out or rule-in unproven opinion.

The "until there is a consensus" illustrates the problem of generic references to "modern science" and "the scientific method" and "experts" as if using those phrases actually means anything final. There are only particular experts and scientists and particular assertions of results using any method at any time. Consensus is not a logical goal, especially in ethics, and often is later decided to be wrong.

The Epicurean viewpoint was never the "consensus" view in the ancient world, and it will never be in the future. Yet it in my view it held and holds the correct answers as to the absence of (1) supernatural forces (2) life after death, (3) absolute standards of virtue. It also presents a practical and logical approach to having confidence in the best way to live in the absence of those fictions. Therefore Epicurus makes many statements to the effect that he prefers to

speaking and teaching correctly rather than being concerned about the praise and acceptance of the crowd.

The short answer is that I think Epicurus was all in favor of a generic attitude of questioning claims of authority, especially when those claims do not rest on evidence observable to the senses. But Epicurus was strongly against the conclusion that confidence in any conclusion is impossible. Epicurus makes conclusions about many topics, but he never takes "because I or he or she said so" as a reasonable basis for those conclusions.

Post by "DaveT" of March 11, 2026 at 1:57 PM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

Yet it in my view it held and holds the correct answers as to the absence of (1) supernatural forces (2) life after death, (3) absolute standards of virtue. It also presents a practical and logical approach to having confidence in the best way to live in the absence of those fictions.

I get it, your view. I lean more to the side that says I don't believe any of those items are true because I have never seen evidence that they are true. Therefore, since I believe them all to be false, I'm not concerned about the amount of evidence I have to dig up to prove what Epicurus taught is true. If those who believe 1 to 3 above want to believe it, no harm is done to me. Now when it comes to organized religions that preach those items, I see the harm they have done with the power of the fear of disobedience.

[Quote from Cassius](#)

The "until there is a consensus" illustrates the problem of generic references to "modern science" and "the scientific method" and "experts" as if using those phrases actually means anything final. There are only particular experts and scientists and particular assertions of results using any method at any time. Consensus is not a logical goal, especially in ethics, and often is later decided to be wrong.

OK. But surely you don't have a problem with relying on expert opinion and consensus of experts on any specific issue when we as average people have zero ability to know about the topic. We all have to draw the line somewhere on what we believe is true, like your 1 to 3 above, and where we don't believe them to be true. We have to trust expert consensus on

specific topics that are far beyond our knowledge when making important decisions. For example, I don't ingest anything that the experts say causes cancer in mice, even though I have no idea if it is possible I'll get cancer, too.

One last point that I think I have to make here. Science and the Scientific Method are distinctly different concepts in common usage and practical applications. Perhaps they are conflated as a result of poor educational systems or force of habit. Conflating the two invites confusion, in my opinion. Throughout the ages Science has eventually and always been shown to be wrong on any topic once better tested ideas came along. The Scientific Method invites and expects that we, as average people and experts in particular, examine any assertion to the best of our ability. This is how we determine whether something is true or false. And always our estimation is based on the best evidence available at the time.

You know, to say, " Consensus is not a logical goal, especially in ethics, and often is later decided to be wrong." is a hard one for me to agree on. Perhaps consensus is not a logical goal in ethics because how to live life well on a daily basis is not individually testable among diverse people. However, consensus on Epicurean general guidelines is testable, and I suggest we arrive at our belief in it by consensus through discussion among friends and comparative study.

Post by "Cassius" of March 12, 2026 at 9:49 AM

All these are difficult issues that everyone has to address, but the first step is seeing that they are in fact issues.

[Quote from DaveT](#)

OK. But surely you don't have a problem with relying on expert opinion and consensus of experts on any specific issue when we as average people have zero ability to know about the topic. We all have to draw the line somewhere on what we believe is true, like your 1 to 3 above, and where we don't believe them to be true. We have to trust expert consensus on specific topics that are far beyond our knowledge when making important decisions. For example, I don't ingest anything that the experts say causes cancer in mice, even though I have no idea if it is possible I'll get cancer, too.

Certainly if I want brain surgery I am going to look for someone I conclude to be an "expert." Even in recent years regarding such things as diet and covid and many other chemicals there is raging debate on safety. It's probably not useful to get too far into specific examples but when there are experts who say exactly opposite things it's not sufficient to rely on expert consensus. At those points you simply have to bring to do your best to educate yourself on the conflicting opinion and use your best individual judgment on which expert to follow.